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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
21 September 1966

State Department review
completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

Viet Cong guerrillas early this morning attacked the Chu Lai airstrip with some 20 mortar rounds, wounding 16 Americans and lightly damaging eight aircraft. US and North Vietnamese aircraft fought a record number of battles on 21 September. US pilots reported destroying two MIG-17s as well as damaging one MIG-21 and two other MIG-17s. No US aircraft were lost as a result of the engagements.

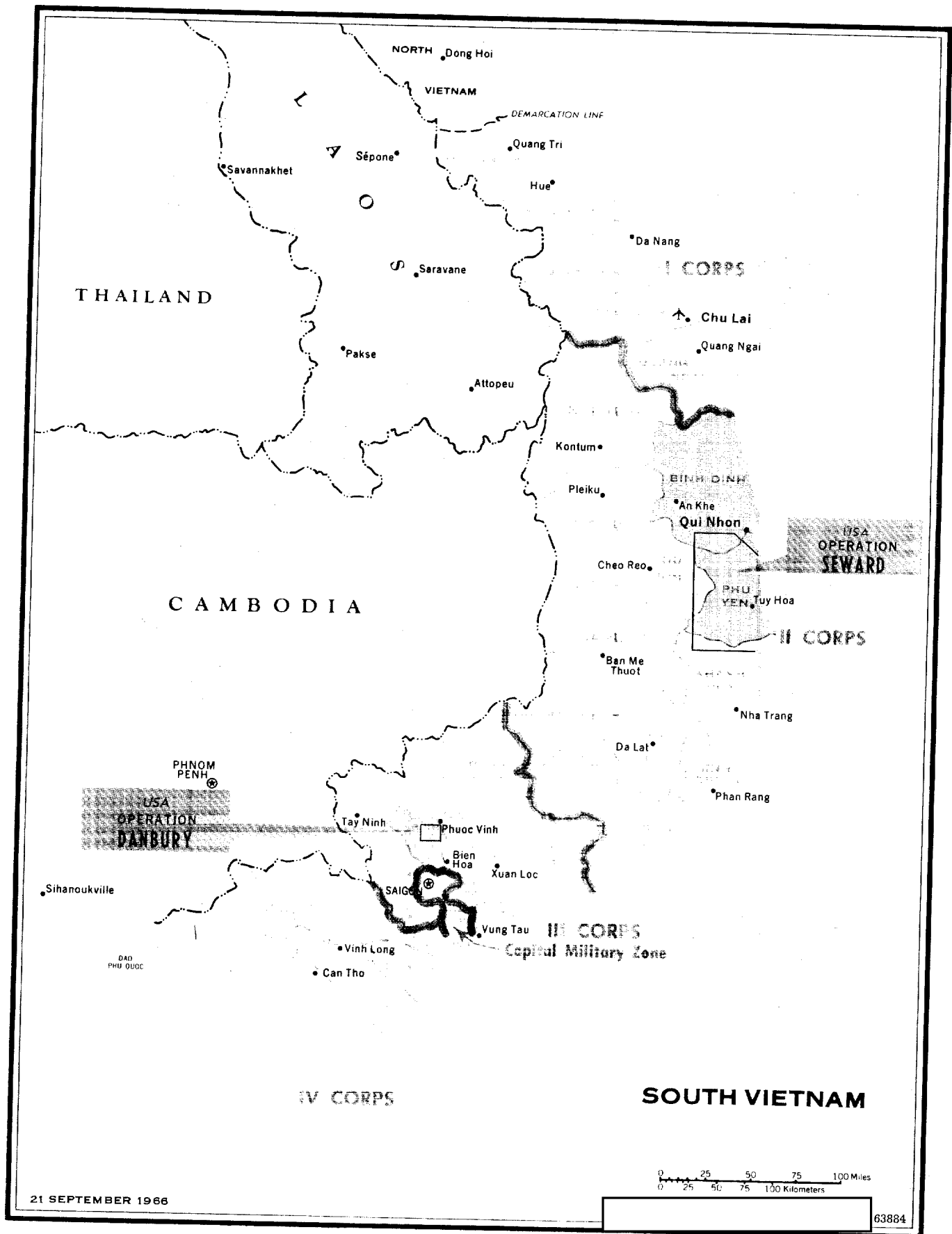
I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: The US Marine airfield at Chu Lai was attacked by Viet Cong guerrillas who fired approximately 20 mortar rounds at the installation, wounding 16 Americans and damaging eight aircraft (Para. 1). Light contact was reported between US troops and Viet Cong soldiers in coastal Phu Yen Province (Para. 2). South Korean forces killed 12 Viet Cong in two engagements in Binh Dinh Province (Para. 3). Operation DANBURY, conducted in Binh Duong Province, ended today with light casualties reported (Para. 4). A North Vietnamese soldier has provided some interesting comments on the morale of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers and their leaders (Paras. 5-7).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: With the first meeting of the new constituent assembly scheduled for 27 September, some future courses of action are already shaping up as potentially troublesome (Paras. 1-3).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments: US and North Vietnamese aircraft fought a record number of aerial battles on 21 September (Paras. 1-3). Three US aircraft were lost on 21 September (Para. 4).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.



I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Viet Cong guerrillas attacked the Chu Lai airstrip with mortars for approximately 15 minutes early this morning. An estimated 20 rounds of 82-mm. mortar shells fell on the airstrip. Initial casualty reports indicate that 16 Americans were wounded, one seriously. Eight aircraft were damaged but all were able to be flown.

2. US soldiers participating in Operation SEWARD in coastal Phu Yen Province reported making contact today with an estimated 30 Viet Cong who were dug in on a ridge line about 13 miles northwest of Tuy Hoa. There were no American casualties in the action; two Viet Cong were killed and one recoilless rifle was captured.

3. In Binh Dinh Province this morning, a South Korean company twice engaged a Viet Cong force of undetermined size in an area about ten miles north of Qui Nhon. There were no friendly losses; 12 Viet Cong were killed and three weapons were captured.

4. Operation DANBURY, a search-and-destroy operation conducted by one battalion of the US 1st Infantry Division in Binh Duong Province, ended today. During this operation, which began on 15 September, four Americans were killed and 24 were wounded. Four Viet Cong were killed and ten suspects captured.

Morale of the VC

5. A captured North Vietnamese soldier has provided some interesting comments on the morale of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers and their leaders. While this particular prisoner was only in South Vietnam three months before he was captured, his statements are consistent with other reports on morale and the will of the Communist leadership to persist.

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6. The captive [redacted]

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[redacted] stated that the VC are tired of fighting but will continue to carry out their mission because of good indoctrination. The constant fighting--for many VC stretching over a period of years--has definitely had a bad effect on their morale. The fact that they were constantly forced to be on the move to avoid harassment by air strikes also disheartened them. The prisoner also mentioned that North Vietnamese soldiers had a very great fear of dying outside their native land.

7. On the other hand, the prisoner stated that "the attitude of the VC/NVA leadership at COSVN and Hanoi was 'good' and their leadership 'adequate.'" He also stated that it was generally believed among the VC that the North Vietnamese Government had underestimated the force and strength of the Americans fighting in South Vietnam. Nevertheless, the source believed that the North Vietnamese Government would continue the war until final victory was achieved. He further stated his belief that if the war effort required sending increasing numbers of North Vietnamese troops, the Hanoi government would not hesitate to do so.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. In anticipation of the first meeting of the constituent assembly on 27 September, the US Embassy has outlined potential difficulties and probable courses of action that various groups within the assembly might be faced with in the next few weeks. Some assembly members are already thinking of the assembly in terms of "opposition" to the military government. Some members are also talking of either turning the assembly into a legislative body after the constitution is drafted, or of granting it a legislative function before its six-month tenure expires. Although there is as yet no discernible widespread trend among the members to extend the assembly's authority, Premier Ky has admitted that he is thinking along the same lines.

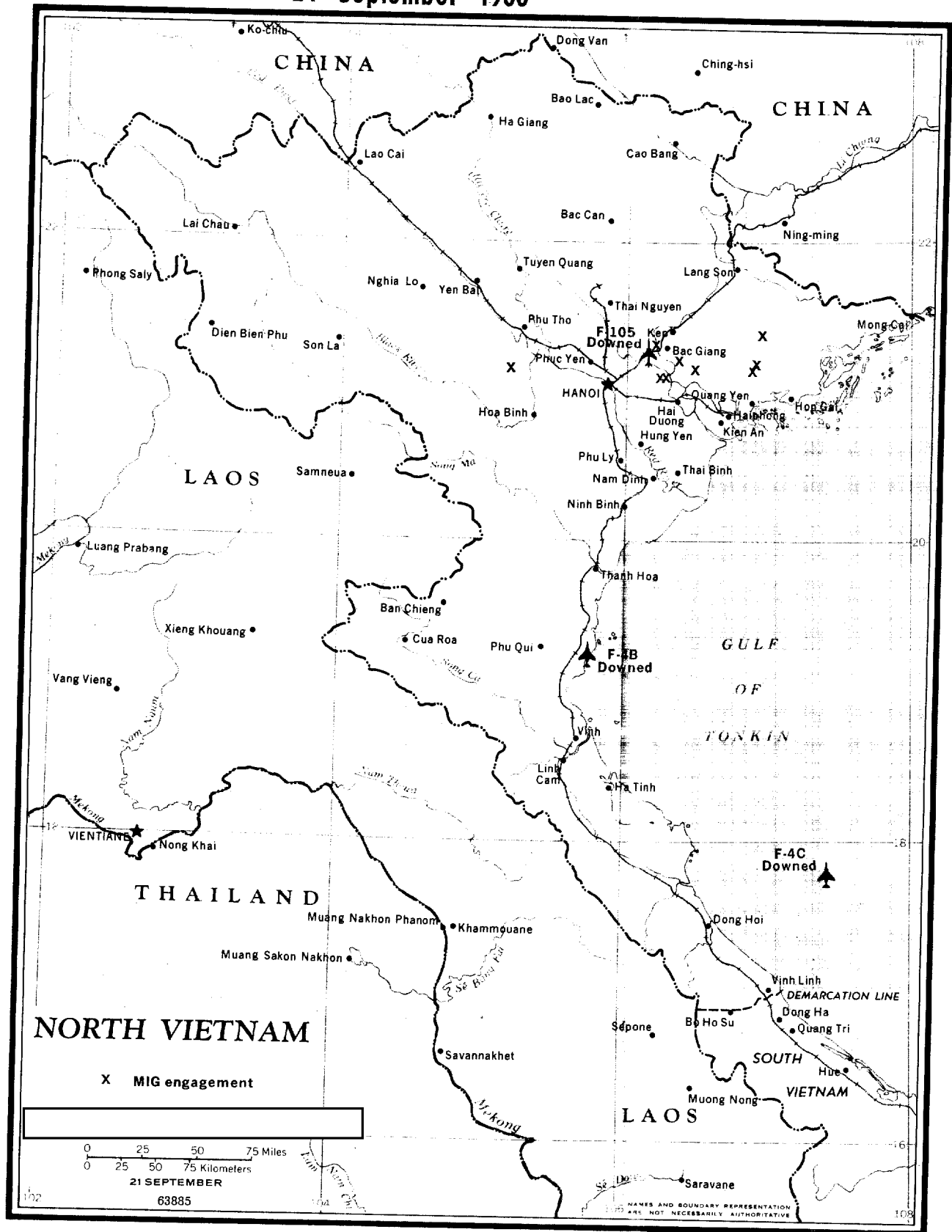
2. Some members have also indicated that one of the first orders of business might be an attempt to nullify Article 20 of the assembly's founding decree, which gives the military Directorate power to veto or revise the drafted constitution. As it stands now, should the Directorate amend the constitution, the assembly would have to muster a two-thirds vote to invalidate the Directorate revisions.

3. Another item of business that might provoke some difficulty will be the election of a president and a secretary general. Among the men aspiring to these positions are several Saigon politicians with pronounced sentiments or backgrounds as either northerners or southerners. In view of the inherent distaste of the people of one region for those of another, there is a distinct possibility that if both positions went to men from one region, a serious north-south split could result and disrupt the effectiveness of the constituent assembly.

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MIG ENGAGEMENTS - 21 September 1966



III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. North Vietnamese fighter activity reached a new high on 21 September as nine flights of US aircraft were engaged by a total of 15 MIG-17s and five MIG-21s. US pilots reported destroying two MIG-17s with cannon fire as well as damaging one MIG-21 and two MIG 17s. There were no US air losses attributable to DRV fighter activity.

2. Pilot reports on the record number of engagements have provided the most conclusive evidence to date that North Vietnamese MIG-21s are using heat-seeking air-to-air missiles. In two of the three encounters with the Fishbed fighters, US flyers observed red or orange missiles--believed to be the Soviet-supplied AA-2 Atoll--under the wings of the MIG-21s. During one engagement involving two MIG-21s and a pair of F4Cs, at least two missiles were fired at the US planes; one came within 100 feet of a US Phantom.

3. The engagements were further distinguished by the unusual appearance of some of the North Vietnamese planes. Most of the MIGs observed were silver in color and had the conventional DRV Air Force markings, but there were reports of "camouflage" on some aircraft. One report stated that one of the destroyed MIG-17s had been painted red with black markings.

US Aircraft Losses

4. Three US aircraft were lost over North Vietnam on 21 September. An F-105 was shot down by ground fire 20 miles northeast of Hanoi. Wingmen reported seeing the downed pilot on the ground but a rescue attempt could not be undertaken because of the location. The other two planes were lost to unknown causes in the southern portion of the DRV. One, a US Navy F4B, was reported missing on a night waterway-reconnaissance mission about 32 miles north of Vinh. No indications of flak or missile activity were reported and search-and-rescue efforts are continuing. The other, an air force F4C, crashed at sea after receiving damage from an unknown source. Both crew members were rescued in good condition.

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